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Dissent/Repression Nexus in the Middle East

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The Middle East is often seen as caught in a cycle of dissent and repression, influencing almost all aspects of existence. This “dissent/repression nexus” is crucial because the Middle East lies at the crossroads of three continents, contains vast natural resource reserves, and has spread conflicts to other parts of the world.

Despite the importance of understanding contention in the Middle East, there has been little systematic study of conflict dynamics in the region. Most research has used one of a handful of methodologies -- event analysis, field research, or social surveys. Each of these studies leaves out important aspects of the dissent/repression nexus.

To address these gaps, an interdisciplinary, multi-university team has set out to study the dissent/repression nexus in the Middle East. Some of their questions include:

- How do dissent and repression influence one another?
- What kinds of repression produce what kinds of dissent, and vice versa?
- How are conflicts influenced by economic and political globalization?



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The project focuses on several important Middle East countries – Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, and Turkey – from 1990 to the present. It examines the process of transformational change, the relationship between individual and social action, and the implications of cultural variation for conflict in these locations.

The team has just completed the second year of the project. This has included in-depth surveys in each country with multiple sources of data, event data analysis, and content analysis of newspapers using Lexis-Nexis. A conference at Mershon Center highlighting the team's work was held on July 31, following a five-week workshop of intensive study.

Essential to the project has been the work of graduate and undergraduate students who each examined one country in depth, focusing on the mechanisms and explanatory theories of repression and dissent in the 1990s. From these case studies, four overarching themes have emerged that are critical in understanding patterns of repression and dissent:

- The importance of rentier states, or states that receive substantial income from oil, foreign aid, or tourism.
- The size and outmigration of Palestinian and Kurdish populations, creating highly mobilized diaspora communities.
- The significance of the 1990-91 Gulf War, which transformed political opportunities and transnational networks among activists.
- The central role of technological and social networks that accompany globalization.

The project is supported by a three-year \$585,000 grant from the National Science Foundation's Human Social Dynamics program on Agents of Change, as well as grants from Ohio State's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and the Mershon Center.

Several articles that discuss results of the study are under review for publication. For more information, see the project website at <http://drnexus.osu.edu>. Besides the principal investigators, this project involves the work of 17 graduate and undergraduate students at Ohio State, University of Maryland, University of Kansas, and Trinity University.

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